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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

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PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 9, 2005

30 DEC 1971

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

Refer to: I-30239/71

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Goals and Objectives of U.S. South Asia Policy

NR
You recently asked for ISA's opinion on what goals we should be seeking for our policies toward South Asia in the wake of the recent crisis. Given the still unsettled state of affairs, this preliminary response is adapted to the fact that the recent crisis has upset prevailing relationships within the area and between it and the great powers so profoundly that they are in a state of flux.

India has emerged as the unchallenged power on the subcontinent. In addition, Mrs. Gandhi's political position has been greatly enhanced internally by the country's military successes in the east. The tide of popular euphoria upon which her fortunes are currently cresting will fade, however, as the hard realities of economic restoration, return of the refugees, and emergence of an independent but helpless Bangla Desh become evident.

The replacement of the Yahya government in Pakistan has ushered in a period of great uncertainty where the perception of what Bhutto may accomplish is mixed. Brilliant and ambitious, he is the sole apparent charismatic leader capable of reordering West Pakistani national priorities. Contradictions in his approach will complicate our relations with him. He is independently wealthy but espouses hard-line socialist aims. He has repeatedly condemned U.S. South Asia policy publicly while showing balance and charm in his private contacts with our diplomats. His announced transfer of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bengali leader, from prison to house arrest is a positive step toward reconciliation with the east, and thus with India, but his statements concerning subcontinental relations continue to be bellicose.

The situation in Bangla Desh is far too murky to permit even preliminary judgments. Indian actions, however, appear to be aimed at removing both the Pakistani military and the non-Bengali population from harm's way. New Delhi also seems to be working toward solidifying the position of the moderate, elected Awami League leadership to head off a power grab by extremist elements.

India's resort to war has underscored the ineffectiveness of the UN in preventing or resolving major crises. It is all the more evident that we need a less public and more time-sensitive medium through which regional participants can be pressed to address their own problems by larger power leverage.

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With these facts in mind, we may discern the broad outlines of a useful policy over the near term. We must take a hand in the restoration of stability and balance in the region, recognizing that South Asia will remain only a secondary area of international interest to us. At the same time, profiting from our experiences in the Middle East, we should avoid commitments to one side or the other that would foreclose freedom of maneuver in the face of significant political change. In that regard, our current stance with military supply lines closed to all participants is, I believe, the proper one for the immediate future.

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Comparison of South Asia with the Middle East should not be carried too far. In South Asia, Moscow has backed the indisputably dominant power. In the Mideast, on the other hand, the Kremlin has no illusions that the Arabs could overpower Israel without its direct intervention. Continuing Israeli capacity for major destructive action in Egypt threatens Soviet political and economic investment in the Middle East.

South Asia Goals

The principal U.S. goal in South Asia is achievement of a stability that will preclude conflicts likely to attract big power involvement. Expressed negatively, the U.S. must work to reduce the polarization that is now in evidence on the subcontinent.

Implementation

Economic restoration and development for both Pakistan and Bangla Desh are obvious prerequisites for achieving stability. From the Defense standpoint, however, our most pressing requirement will be to recommend adequate security arrangements for Pakistan. A defenseless Pakistan would tempt India as well as Afghanistan. On the other hand, a Pakistan committed to achieving military "parity" with India, or to regaining its "lost territory," could keep South Asia in precarious turmoil, assuming that outside powers were willing to finance and equip such a posture. Development of a U.S. military supply policy for Pakistan hopefully (1) will move in some kind of concert with Chinese actions; (2) be contingent upon the resumption by Pakistan of sound economic programs; and (3) be accompanied by a cooperative security program with Islamic Middle East countries. Pakistan will need tangible as well as diplomatic support from the Middle East if she is to attain self-confidence and break out from her current diplomatic isolation. Both Pakistan and the U.S. can capitalize on the strong anti-Soviet fallout in North Africa and the Middle East which has resulted from Soviet association with India's actions.

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The U.S. could resume shipment of spares and could provide some attrition replacements to Pakistan, following full political settlement with India and Bangla Desh. As a next step, we could provide unmistakably defensive military hardware, such as anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, followed possibly by interceptor aircraft.

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The question of a military supply policy towards India is a very different matter. Militarily, especially vis-a-vis Pakistan, India does not need our lethal hardware. Within a decade or less, it will probably not need Soviet offensive equipment either. In the interim, New Delhi will be seeking to keep an independence of action against the day that indigenous production fully assures its national security. The USSR, on the other hand, will seek to increase its influence in India, pressing toward the day when New Delhi, still short of achieving domestic production independence, must grant Soviet base rights. Unlike the Pakistani case, a U.S. policy reversion to the April 1967 dictum, or even the 1966 approach under which we permitted sales of nonlethal items only, is capable of providing a necessary symbolic alternative to Soviet dominance.

As mentioned above, a better approach than any of the foregoing that treat India and Pakistan in traditional isolation from one another, is an effort to achieve detente -- a microcosm of what we seek to establish in our own dealings with Moscow and Peking. An unequivocal military success and a stable governmental position creates in India a certain disposition towards magnanimity on this score. Mrs. Gandhi has already indicated a willingness to negotiate all issues with Pakistan. Our policy approach should hold her feet to the fire. The end of 13 years of military rule in Pakistan with the old order in eclipse lays the groundwork for Islamabad's susceptibility to new solutions.

Overall, we should be cautious in interpreting recent South Asian events as a smashing Soviet "victory" achieved partly at U.S. expense. India is not apt to become a docile or easy ally for the Soviets. India inevitably will wish to improve relations with both Washington and Peking as a balance to the Soviet presence. China, in turn, will eventually resume what has been until recently a clear effort to improve relations with India. In pursuit of South Asian stability, therefore, we need a U.S. policy that is flexibly assigned to support all the countries of the area. We need to move decisively toward humanitarian efforts on behalf particularly of Pakistan and Bangla Desh. None of the countries of the area could afford the luxury of a constant state of hostility toward its neighbors. Resumption of our larger-scale economic or military relationships therefore should be keyed to each country's preparedness for detente and for reconciliation. This is where U.S. leverage can count.

Robert McNamara

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